

# Bush Can't Take Emboldened Congress For Granted in Agreements With Soviets

## WASHINGTON INSIGHT

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WASHINGTON — President Bush and Congress are crossing swords with increasing frequency on foreign policy, and that indicates Mr. Bush can't take lawmakers for granted as he moves toward agreements to reshape East-West relations.

Congress has defied the president on a variety of foreign-policy issues in recent weeks. Lawmakers tied down his request for "emergency" aid for Panama and Nicaragua, and they forced the administration to cut military aid to El Salvador.

The Senate declared that Mr. Bush shouldn't even bother asking Congress to ratify a trade treaty with the Soviet Union if the Kremlin continues to strong-arm Lithuania. Congress also displeased the White House by saying it recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital. And lawmakers are moving on their own to impose sanctions against Iraq's strongman, Saddam Hussein.

"A lot of us think there's no political loss to challenging the president on these issues, because the American people don't support him," says Rep. Howard Berman (D., Calif.), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee who has led the drive for sanctions on Iraq.

To some extent, such stands represent normal congressional-White House jousting over control of foreign policy. But they are a far cry from what the president and his aides had counted on after Mr. Bush, in the first big power test of 1990, was sustained

on his controversial veto of a bill that would have guaranteed Chinese students haven in the U.S. The president, against the counsel of some of his advisers, fought to get that veto upheld in hopes of convincing lawmakers that he had the muscle to win such disputes.

Now it appears that Mr. Bush's stand on China may be backfiring. After persuading Congress to let him handle U.S. reaction to China's crackdown on pro-democracy students, Mr. Bush has failed with his soft-spoken approach to persuade China's leaders to loosen up. That sour outcome has emboldened lawmakers to challenge the president on other issues. And Mr. Bush's apparent decision to seek a renewal of China's most-favored-nation trade status may cause more bickering.

This suggests Mr. Bush may encounter bumps in the road as he tries to nail down agreements changing the U.S.-Soviet relationship and repositioning the U.S. to deal with a revamped Europe.

There is broad congressional support for relaxing tensions with the Soviets, and lawmakers are certain to favor new arms-cutting pacts. But the Senate warning on the Soviet trade treaty suggests that congressional sympathy for the Baltic republics' attempts to break away from the Kremlin's grip could complicate administration efforts to strike economic agreements with Moscow.

Many lawmakers think the trade treaty, for instance, would mainly benefit the Soviets; as a result, it gives the U.S. leverage that "we need to use," says Sen. Richard Lugar (R., Ind.), one of the president's strongest congressional allies on foreign policy. The administration already is bending to this sentiment, signaling it may drop plans to sign the trade treaty at the May 31 U.S.-Soviet summit.

Since Mr. Bush took office, he has preached that Congress should keep its nose out of presidential foreign-policy decisions. That blunt stand may be adding to the president's problems by producing a backlash among lawmakers who want to demonstrate they won't meekly defer to the president on foreign policy.

The administration also suffers because its acknowledged master at stroking Congress on foreign policy, Secretary of State James Baker, is preoccupied dealing with changes sweeping over Eastern Europe.

A bigger problem for Mr. Bush is a feeling, sometimes uniting Democratic liberals and Republican conservatives, that the president is too worried about the stability of existing regimes in places such as Moscow and Beijing and therefore too reticent to criticize their actions.

"My guess is that my colleagues feel that in many instances the president is showing an excess of tolerance" for such regimes, says Rep. Berman. "Basically, I think the American people like the idea of an American foreign policy guided by a principle, and the principle is to encourage democracy and human rights."